

MA THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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PRESS RELEASE

Plant Operation

GAUGUIN AND HIS CIRCLE IN BRITTANY: THE PRINTS OF THE PONT-AVEN SCHOOL
August 14 - September 27, 1987

Eighty-five rare prints by Paul Gauguin and eight other artists who worked in the late 1880s and early 1890s around Pont-Aven, a small village in Brittany on the northwestern coast of France, will be exhibited at The Cleveland Museum of Art from August 14 through September 27, 1987. **Gauguin and His Circle in Brittany: The Prints of the Pont-Aven School** is the first exhibition in the United States to focus on the Pont-Aven printmakers whose bold and inventive works are relatively unknown despite their importance in the French printmaking revival of the late 19th century and their influence on avant-garde movements of subsequent decades.

The artists represented in this exhibition--Gauguin, Emile Bernard, Paul Sérusier, Armand Seguin, Henri Delavallée, Roderic O'Connor, Robert Bevan, Maxime Maufra, and Cuno Amiet--were attracted to Brittany by its sharp, clear light and picturesque landscape and by the Breton peasants' simple life, which the artists prized for its contrast to modern urban life. Rejecting the Impressionists' preoccupation with a purely visual analysis of the world, they sought to integrate their subjective impressions of nature and peasant life with an abstract treatment of form.

Inspired by such diverse sources as Japanese woodblock prints and medieval stained glass, they created prints with flat, simplified shapes and curved flowing lines. Their prints almost always depicted the Breton landscape with its rolling hills, windswept trees, and rocky coastline, and the quaintly dressed Breton peasants in starched collars and coiffes--forms well suited to the linear rhythms and repeated shapes of their new style,

2- gauguin and his circle in brittany

which they called Synthetism. Since their prints--lithographs, zincographs (lithographs made from zinc plates instead of stones), woodcuts, and etchings --were largely experimental, the artists seldom made more than a few impressions for themselves or friends. Those that were actually published were in small editions.

Gauguin and Bernard first showed Synthetist paintings and prints at an exhibition in the Café Volpini on the grounds of the 1889 Paris Universal Exposition. Gauguin's eleven zincographs contain scenes from his earlier paintings of Arles, Martinique, and Brittany, and were printed on canary yellow paper. Bernard's set of seven zincographs (five are shown in the exhibition) depicted Breton life and were embellished with watercolor. Although nothing was sold, the exhibition and catalogue disseminated Synthetist ideas and stimulated other artists to create prints in this style.

Paul Sérusier's talent for explaining intuitive artistic practices made him the theoretician of the group. His lithographs evoke the harsh life of the Breton peasants. Armand Seguin, a Breton by birth, was technically inventive, working in many different print media. His etchings of Breton landscapes carried Synthetism almost to the point of abstraction. Although Henri Delavallée spent time in Pont-Aven and often depicted Breton subjects, his detailed and highly finished etchings are more traditional in style.

The Irish artist Roderic O'Connor's etchings of the windblown trees and turbulent skies of the Brittany coast were executed with swift slashing lines reminiscent of the brushwork of Vincent van Gogh. The English artist Robert Bevan also used long, fluid lines to depict the rolling hills and trees of Brittany. In his beautifully executed etchings and aquatints, Breton-born Maxime Maufra sought to evoke emotional reactions to nature. Cuno Amiet, one of Switzerland's foremost artists, worked briefly in Pont-Aven, where he made three small etchings.

3- gauguin and his circle in brittany

The prints in this exhibition come from a collection assembled by Samuel Josefowitz for the Fridart Foundation and are supplemented by seven lithographs by Gauguin from the collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art. The exhibition was organized by Dr. Caroline Boyle-Turner, guest curator at the Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam, and circulated by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service (SITES). The fully illustrated catalogue which accompanies the exhibition, written by Dr. Boyle-Turner, is available at the Museum's Bookstore for \$17.50.

On Sunday, August 16, at 1:30 pm, Dr. Boyle-Turner will present a free public lecture on "The Role of Gauguin for the Printmakers of the Pont-Aven Circle," in the Recital Hall of the Museum.

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Complementing the SITES exhibition, and running concurrently with it, is an exhibition of forty-five prints by artists who were contemporary with the Pont-Aven printmakers and who were affected by similar influences, such as Japanese prints and Symbolist literature. **Contemporaries of the Pont-Aven Printmakers**, drawn from the collection of The Cleveland Museum of Art, includes prints by Toulouse-Lautrec and Mary Cassatt, the Symbolist artists Odilon Redon and Pierre Puvis de Chavannes, and the Nabis, a group--including Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, and Edouard Vuillard--with close ties to Gauguin and Sérusier.

The exhibition was organized by Jane Glaubinger, associate curator in the Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings. She also supervised the installation of the SITES exhibition and prepared the explanatory wall text which accompanies both shows.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.